



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



MESSAGE FROM SDDVA SECRETARY WHITLOCK—LET US NEVER FORGET!

Memorial Day was born of compassion and empathy for those who courageously gave their lives to safeguard us and our way of life.

Let us all pause this Memorial Day to remember great and brave Americans – to recognize their valor and applaud the blessings their bravery has secured.

Throughout our nation's history, the freedoms we enjoy have been won and protected by an elite group who understand the greatest and most selfless love.

Remembering those sacrifices and what they have meant to our nation is the duty of the living. Hundreds of thousands of young American lives were lost on the battlefields and the concept of Memorial Day became a tradition renewed by each generation's sacrifice.

Our records reflect South Dakota military casualties by wartime period were: World War I – 1,038; World War II – 1,614; Korean – 177; Vietnam – 192; and Gulf War – 35.

On this Memorial Day, let us all pledge to renew our dedication to the true meaning of Memorial Day. Let us all enjoy the lives we lead because of the generations of young Americans who gave their lives so that all of us could live in freedom and prosperity. Let us continue to educate our children about the price paid for their freedom.

Our greatest duty to the men and women who have died in service to our country is to never, ever forget what they have done for each of us – and what they have done for us as a nation. They led colorful, vivid, and passionate lives and we owe it to them and their families to honor and pay tribute to their sacrifice.

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JOINT MORTGAGE AND HOUSING ASSISTANCE WEBSITE LAUNCHED

To ensure homeowners and renters have current and accurate housing assistance information during the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), along with several other agencies, launched a new unified mortgage and housing assistance website.

Veterans and service members with a [VA home loan](#), other homeowners with a federally backed mortgage and tenants living in properties with a federally backed mortgage have relief options if they have been financially impacted by COVID-19.

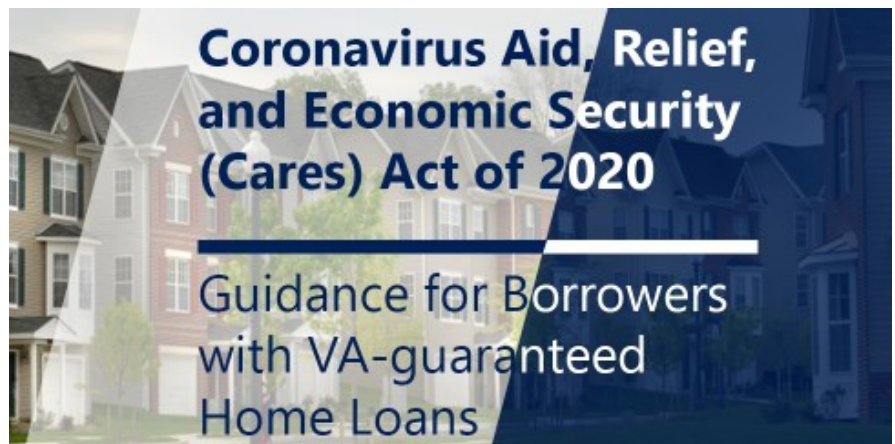
“The VA is committed to ensuring veterans and service members have the financial tools available to make decisions that work for their unique situations,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This collaboration provides an invaluable resource, enabling all homeowners and renters to access up-to-date information regarding their housing needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

The joint website with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Federal Housing Finance Agency and the Department of Housing and Urban Development consolidates: mortgage relief options, protections for renters, resources for additional help and information on how to avoid COVID-19 related scams. It also provides tools for homeowners to determine if their mortgage is federally backed and for renters to find out if their rental unit is financed by Fannie Mae or Freddie Mac.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the VA continues providing home loan services to veterans and service members who have earned those benefits, working with lenders, servicers and appraisers on temporary measures to assist in processing and servicing VA home loans.

These measures include offering alternatives for appraisers to determine property value in lieu of interior inspections and providing lenders with additional information to close loans remotely. Such alternative procedures help ensure VA borrowers can close on a home even during this pandemic and prevent foreclosures when possible.

VA borrowers experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19 can review [VA guidance for borrowers](#) and either [request forbearance](#) through the mortgage [loan servicer](#) collecting their monthly payments or call 877-827-3702 to speak with a VA Home Loan Representative.



VA LAUNCHES CLINICAL TRIAL FOR VETERANS WITH COVID-19

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) began a new clinical trial to test a Food and Drug Administration-approved prostate cancer drug as a potential treatment for male veterans with COVID-19. In a double-blind randomized controlled trial, VA scientists will compare the drug [degarelix](#) (trade name Firmagon) to a placebo for improving the clinical outcomes of nearly 200 veterans who have been hospitalized with COVID-19.

“Veterans who have contracted this virus are in need of immediate care,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This trial is an important step in advancing knowledge of a potential treatment for those infected with COVID-19. We are here to do everything in our power to preserve and protect life.”

Degarelix is often used to treat advanced cases of prostate cancer. It works by rapidly, but temporarily, suppressing the body’s production of male hormones. These hormones can fuel the growth of prostate cancer. Scientists are testing degarelix because lab evidence suggests male hormones trigger the production of a protein called TMPRSS2 on lung tissue. The virus that causes COVID-19 relies on TMPRSS2 to enter lung tissues.

Researchers from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and Columbia University applied advanced artificial intelligence and computational genomics techniques and used that lab evidence for this COVID-19 data. The researchers collaborated with VA to plan the new trial.

[Potential side effects of degarelix](#) are typically linked to long-term treatment. In the trial, patients will be administered only one dose of the drug that will last 28 days. Any side effects of degarelix are thus expected to be temporary.

By temporarily lowering male hormone levels, researchers believe they can reduce the production of TMPRSS2 in lung tissue and thus prevent the virus from penetrating lung cells. Hormone levels will return to normal at the end of treatment.

The study is not suitable for female veterans. Existing evidence shows degarelix may have the opposite effect in the female body by increasing TMPRSS2 production, thus worsening the severity of COVID-19 symptoms.

The West Los Angeles VA Medical Center is leading the trial. The study also involves VA medical centers in New York (Brooklyn and Manhattan) and Washington state (Puget Sound), leveraging the Prostate Cancer Foundation/VA network of centers of excellence. The University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is involved in the analysis of research specimens, but not the clinical element of the study.

VA researchers expect to complete the trial in about four months.

For more information, visit research.va.gov.

FDA Approves Degarelix to Treat Advanced Prostate Cancer

US ARMY FIELD BAND TO PROVIDE VIRTUAL PERFORMANCES

In an effort to adapt their mission, The U.S. Army Field Band from Washington, D.C. is presenting daily live stream concerts in hopes of keeping America connected at a time where meeting in person is impossible. The virtual concert series: "We Stand Ready" is streaming on these two sites:

<https://www.youtube.com/ArmyFieldBand>

<https://www.facebook.com/ArmyFieldBand>

In regards to the upcoming Memorial Day weekend they have multiple shows planned that are geared toward honoring veterans!

Friday (5/22), Saturday (5/23) at 6pm (CT)

Sunday (5/24) and Monday (5/25) at 12pm (CT)

Their regular programming is a mix of musical, educational, and interactive segments, all while they continue to observe social distancing guidelines. They are broadcasting a mix of live chamber music concerts and pre-recorded shows from each of their performing components: the Concert Band and Soldiers' Chorus, the Jazz Ambassadors, and the Six-String Soldiers. The content and production is facilitated completely by members of the U.S. Army Field Band.

Their hope is this daily online presence will provide a sense of unity, inspiration, and calm during these uncertain times, and remind all Americans of the strength and resilience of our country.

You can share directly from their social media channels. Also, their website:

www.armyfieldband.com has a livestream schedule and links to their Facebook, Youtube, Instagram, Flickr, and Twitter pages.



WE STAND READY
VIRTUAL CONCERT SERIES

REMEMBERING
**AMERICA'S
HEROES**
MEMORIAL DAY
WITH THE UNITED STATES ARMY FIELD BAND

MAY 25 • 1 PM

WATCH AT
ARMYFIELDBAND.COM

MEMORIAL DAY
WITH THE U.S.
ARMY FIELD BAND

ALPHA BATTERY JUNIOR ENLISTED SOLDIERS SHARPEN LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Soldiers with Alpha Battery, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion completed a unique training event while deployed to Germany, which allowed lower enlisted soldiers to try their hand at leading squad sized elements.

The situational training exercise, or STX, on April 21-23 gave the junior enlisted soldiers experience and skills to help prepare them for future leadership positions. The training incorporated several weeks of classroom instruction, leading up to a field exercise, where the soldiers were evaluated on the skills they learned.

Soldiers spent three days in the field and assembled into four squads of specialists and privates to perform their tasks. The soldiers were evaluated on their ability to conduct the troop leading procedures, receive and give a brief in the operations order format, and conduct back planning.

Soldiers also had to identify Warrior Tasks and Battle Drills they could conduct on their own to prepare for the training lanes. The lanes were dynamic with scenarios and missions involving civilian role players and opposing forces.

Enlisted soldiers were not alone in the exercise. A Battery staff sergeants assisted in the exercise as squad mentors while unit sergeants controlled base operations.

This training allowed the enlisted soldiers to develop and build confidence in their leadership skills.



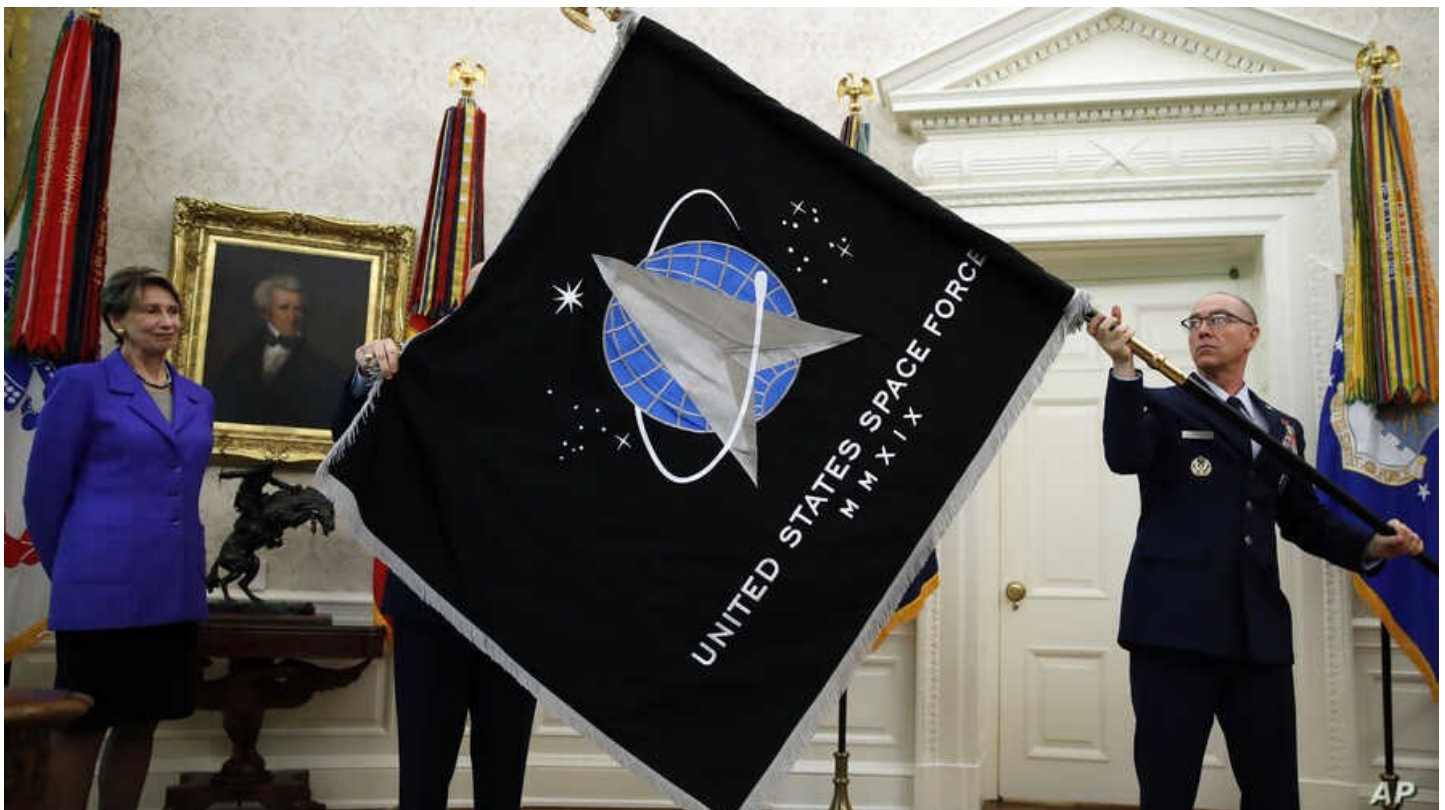
SPACE FORCE FLAG PRESENTED TO PRESIDENT TRUMP

The new Space Force flag was unveiled last Friday at the White House, the nation's first new military service flag in more than 70 years.

Air Force Secretary Barbara Barrett, Chief of Space Operations Gen. Jay Raymond and senior enlisted adviser Chief Master Sgt. Robert Towberman were on hand to present the flag to President Trump.

The flag resembles the seal released in January, with an arrowhead set in front of a globe, accented by stars.

The new service is working to transfer 16,000 airman previously assigned to Space Command to be the first operators and support personnel assigned to Space Force, with a goal of completion by the end of the year. After that initial block, the service will begin recruiting troops from the Army and Navy's space units.



STATE CEMETERY UPDATE

SDDVA Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard had the opportunity to visit the state veterans cemetery project last week and was updated on the status of the development.

"It's exciting to visit the cemetery and see the progress that has been made," said Deputy Secretary Pollard. "You can feel just how meaningful this cemetery is going to be."

"Although it isn't substantially complete yet, the Committal Shelter will be the centerpiece of the cemetery," said Pollard. "Coming around the rolling hills where the service flags will be, revealing the Committal Shelter will be an emotional experience to all who visit."

Open excavations for foundations and utilities will still be present through the next several weeks. Journey is installing fencing and gates now that grades are close to being finished. This is needed to control access to the project.

Tours or site visits from people outside of the construction team are not currently allowed due to safety issues and COVID-19. SDDVA will work with our partners to schedule periodic tours later in the process.

Foundations have been completed for the administration building and the committal shelter, and wood framing has begun. Work has begun on the columbarium wall.

To date we have pre-applications from 240 veterans and 192 spouses for burial at the State Veterans Cemetery.

"We thank all who have worked so diligently to make this cemetery a reality," said Pollard.



VIRTUAL DEDICATION OF KOREAN WAR MEMORIALS IN ALL 50 STATES

Hannah Y Kim, a Korean American woman with a mission, will unveil a website (www.KoreanWarMemorials.com) that will feature photos of nearly 180 Korean War memorials she has personally visited. Kim traveled 132,100 miles across six continents in 30 countries that participated in the Korean War (1950-1953) and, in the United States, all 50 states and U.S. Territories of Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, and the American Samoa. She visited South Dakota in May of 2018.

The online portal will present 400 videos with stories of nearly 1,200 veterans she has met throughout her journeys between 2017 and 2019, including her 90-day tour across America in 2018.

Originally scheduled for a launch in time for the 70th anniversary of the Korean War on June 25th, 2020, the website will make the U.S. content available sooner for Americans to visit over the Memorial Day weekend. The U.S. content includes more than 1,000 photos of nearly 100 memorials Kim has visited, with a video of her interviewing local veterans and supporters at each site.

"It breaks my heart that most of the Memorial Day commemorations across the nation have been canceled due to COVID-19. I want to ensure that those who died fighting for our freedoms will be remembered and honored, albeit remotely. I hope people will viscerally see that freedom is not free," says Kim.

The website will feature a virtual Wall of Remembrance with the names of nearly 41,000 killed worldwide in the Korean War, including more than 36,000 Americans from each U.S. state and Territory. Visitors will be able to pay tribute by leaving comments.

"I wouldn't be here without the sacrifices of the veterans and wish to convey the gratitude of the Korean people. Ultimately, this website is our collective gift to the veterans, their fallen comrades and families," adds Kim, who was able to develop the website through the support of Naeil Foundation, an organization established by successful second-generation Korean Americans. Most of her travels were funded with donations from her Korean American family and friends who pitched in to express their thanks.

A former chief of staff to Congressman Charles B. Rangel (retired), and founder of Remember727, Kim has made it her lifelong mission to honor the Korean War veterans and promote peace on the Korean Peninsula. Her devoted activism began in 2008 at the age of 24 when she lobbied Congress to enact legislation, signed by President Barack Obama in 2009, which established July 27 as National Korean War Veterans Armistice Day in the United States.

Kim is also the official Ambassadors of the Korean War Veterans Memorial Foundation USA (KWVMF), which is currently raising funds to add a physical Wall of Remembrance to the National Korean War Memorial in Washington, DC. She will direct a link to the KWVMF's donation page for anyone who wishes to support their efforts to memorialize the names of 36,000 Americans who died in Korea.



UPCOMING EVENTS

May 25—Memorial Day

May 25—State Offices closed

Jun 14—Flag Day

Jun 21—Fathers Day

Jun 27—DAV State Convention—DAV Headquarters—Sioux Falls

Jul 6—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)

Jul 10—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Bldg. 145—Room 108—Fort Meade VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

Aug 24-27—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—Ramkota Conference Center—Pierre

Sep 3—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair

Sep 3-7—SD State Fair

Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)

Oct 26-30—National Summit on Women Veterans Issues (more information coming)

Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

The Coronavirus pandemic has forced all of us to re-view our Memorial Day programs. Many of you have worked with local community TV stations and radio stations to carry your programs. Many of you are hosting the programs but attendees must stay in their vehicles. Whatever the program, thank you for keeping our heroes in your hearts. Thank you for the messages you are sharing in your communities.

A special shout out of thanks to our own Ashley Lauing, senior secretary at the State Veterans Home, for creating a video Memorial Day program to share with our residents at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home.



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